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PAKISTAN SAYS IT IS IN 'OPEN WAR' AGAINST NEIGHBOUR AFGHANISTAN

Pakistan bombed major cities in Afghanistan on Friday, and said the neighbours are in "open war" following months of tit-for-tat clashes | P21

PAK ARMY CLAIMS IT KILLED 274 TALIBAN MEN

Pakistan Army spokesperson Lt Gen Ahmad Sharif Chaudhry said his forces "killed 274 Taliban personnel, while 400 were injured". Twelve Pakistani soldiers were killed, while 27 others injured, he added. AFP journalists heard shellfire and gunfire in Torkham, with Afghan soldiers heading towards the frontier after overnight bombardment by Pakistan

MAST QALANDAR VS 'REACHING THEIR COLLAR'

- "Our patience has run out. Now it will be *Dama Dam Mast Qalandar*," Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said in a post on X
- However, Taliban govt spokesman Mujahid said the recent strikes were intended to send a clear message that "our hand can reach their collar." He claimed Taliban had seized 19 Pakistani military posts

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PAKISTANI SOLDIERS KILLED IN LATEST ROUND OF ATTACKS, SAYS TALIBAN

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

Kejri, others let off in excise scam

Special judge Jitendra Singh raps CBI for procedural lapses, refuses to put accused on trial

UDAYAN KISHORE @ New Delhi

A Delhi court on Friday discharged former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and 22 others, including deputy CM Manish Sisodia and ex-BRS leader K Kavitha in the alleged excise scam, finding it unworthy of trial as it junked the CBI chargesheet.

Hours later, the CBI moved the Delhi High Court challenging the trial court order.

Trial court special judge Jitendra Singh also pulled up the CBI for procedural lapses, violation of constitutional principles and relying on hearsay evidence. He also found the 'South Group' label for the excise policy accused particularly inappropriate, adding he will recommend a departmental inquiry against the investigating officer of the case.

Arvind Kejriwal gets emotional as he addresses the media on Friday | PTI

It's a historic verdict. The court has proved that Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and AAP are *kattar imaandar* (staunchly honest). I challenge the PM to hold fresh polls in Delhi. If BJP wins over 10 seats, I will quit politics

— Arvind Kejriwal, AAP convener

***Satyamev Jayate* (truth alone triumphs). This (case) was a web of lies. Judiciary has cut right through it. Who will account for the time that I lost with my kids (due to her incarceration for five months)?**

— K Kavitha, Telangana Jagruthi president

"Prosecution case, as presented in the chargesheet, rests largely on surmises, conjectures, and inferential leaps unsupported by cogent material," the judge said.

Singh said that the policy was the outcome of a structured governmental process involving multiple departments, expert committees and cabinet-level approvals, and the decisions, even if later withdrawn or criticised, "cannot by themselves give rise to criminal liability unless supported by clear evidence of quid pro quo, personal gain, or misuse of office".

Prosecution case does not disclose even the threshold of prima facie suspicion, far less the "grave suspicion" mandated by settled principles of criminal jurisprudence, the court said. Observing that the judicial task was not to secure a convenient outcome or to endorse a dominant narrative, but to uphold the rule of law, the judge refused to put the accused on trial.

The judge rejected the charge that Kejriwal as the then CM exercised overarching control over the conspiracy relating to the formulation and implementation of the excise policy, saying the only principal material relied upon to implicate him was the statement of approver, which was "without any independent corroboration".

GDP projected to grow 7.6% in FY26 under new series

PUSHPITA DEY @ New Delhi

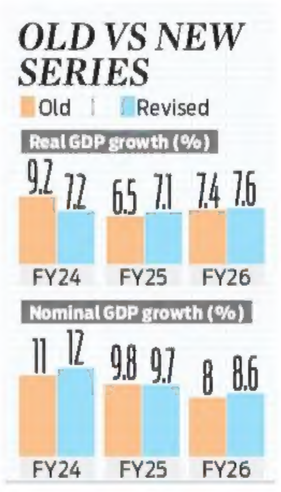
THE Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Friday released a new series of annual and quarterly National Accounts with 2022-23 as the base year, replacing the 2011-12 series, and raised India's real GDP growth estimate for FY26 to 7.6% from 7.4% projected earlier.

Quarterly data showed that real GDP growth in Q3 of 2025-26 eased to 7.8% from 8.4% in Q2. In the corresponding year-ago period, the economy recorded 8% growth.

Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran said that given the revised data, strong Q3 performance, and an improving outlook for capital flows and trade frameworks, FY27 real GDP growth projection was revised upward from 6.8-7.2% range to 7-7.4% with upward risk. The CEA added that with full-year growth estimated at 7.6% for FY26, the economy would need to expand by over 7.8% in Q4 to meet the projection.

The base year revision aims to better capture structural changes in the economy, incorporate new data sources, refine estimation methodologies, and enhance coverage and accuracy.

MoSPI Secretary Saurabh Garg highlighted the adoption of double deflation in the new series. "Earlier, single deflation methods were used in several sectors. Now, double deflation has been implemented in agriculture and manufacturing. This means more accurate measurement of real value added."



Barbers deny entry to Dalits, govt opens salon for them

AMIT S UPADHYE @ Hubballi

AFTER a bizarre turn of events at a village in Mundargi taluk of Gadag district, the state government has opened a barber shop to ensure Dalits get a haircut.

Singatalur village now has probably the first such barber shop run by the government. It was inaugurated by the social welfare department.

Local residents said that a barber shop in the village had refused a haircut to a Dalit youth a few weeks ago. As tension escalated, local administration officials reached the village and held peace meetings. But despite their efforts, barbers refused to give haircuts to Dalits. The administration served a notice to the shop and directed it to shut.

On Thursday, the social welfare department opened the new barber shop where Dalits and other villagers can get a haircut. But Dalit activists pointed out that the government cannot go on building barber shops, temples and hotels wherever the entry of Dalits is frowned upon. They demanded strict action against the village barbers and sought that new laws be passed to ensure that Dalits do not face discrimination.

Gadag Social Welfare Department Deputy Director Nanda Hanabatti, inaugurating the shop, urged the people to give up feelings of superiority and inferiority and to live with the noble mindset that all are equal.

Tahsildar PS Erriswamy said that even so many years after Independence and when research is being conducted on the moon, it is unfortunate that untouchability still exists. P5

JACKS GIVES PAK LIFE

Will Jacks' 32 off 18 helps England beat New Zealand in Colombo on Friday. Pakistan now need to beat Sri Lanka by 65 runs or have to chase any target set by Sri Lanka in 13 overs on Saturday | AFP | P19

EXPRESS READ

Canadian PM arrives in Mumbai for 4-day India visit to reset ties

MUMBAI: Canadian PM Mark Carney arrived in Mumbai on Friday, commencing a four-day visit to India that is seen as a pivotal effort to reset bilateral ties and expand economic engagement between the two countries. Carney will hold talks with PM Narendra Modi on March 2.

Omar reaches Hubballi, says Valley will rejoice Ranji win

AMIT S UPADHYE @ Hubballi

As the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team is inching closer towards winning its first-ever Ranji Trophy final being played in Hubballi, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah landed in the city on Friday to cheer for his team. He will be at the Raj Nagar cricket stadium on Saturday.

Upon arriving, he said it is a matter of pride that the team reached the Ranji final for the first time. "We will return from here with the trophy." P7

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah at the Hubballi Airport on Friday | DHEMANTH

'EXTRA-MARITAL AFFAIR'

Just before polls, Vijay's wife calls it quits

PRABHAKAR TAMILARASU @ Chennai

SANKGEETHA Vijay, wife of actor-politician and Tamizhaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) leader Vijay Chandrasekar, has filed a divorce petition before the Chengalpattu court alleging cruelty and adultery. The family court has summoned Vijay to appear before it on April 20.

Sankgeetha accused her husband of having an extra-marital relationship with an actress and that he has subjected her to "persistent mental cruelty, neglect and desertion".

If required, she said she would implead the actress as second respondent. She urged the court to hold in-camera proceedings to protect the privacy and dignity of the parties and their children.

On December 3 last, Sankgeetha filed the petition before the Principal District Judge Court, Chengalpattu, under provisions of the Special Marriage Act, 1954.

The petition was transferred to the family court on February 24. After the first hearing in the case on Thursday, the family court adjourned the matter to April 20 and directed Vijay to appear in person.

In her petition, Sankgeetha said the marriage was first registered in the UK on July 10, 1998, and later solemnised according to Hindu rites in Chennai on August 25, 1999. The petition stated that the marriage was initially cordial and that she devoted herself to family life and raising their children while supporting Vijay's professional commitments.

However, she alleged that in April 2021 she discovered that Vijay was involved in an adulterous relationship with an actress, which caused "deep emotional pain and mental suffering". Despite assurances that the relationship would end, she claimed their association continued. Sankgeetha also contended that attempts to resolve the dispute amicably through legal notices and personal discussions between 2021 and 2025 failed. She alleged that financial restrictions were imposed on her and that the marital relationship had irretrievably broken down.

Seeking dissolution of marriage, she has requested permanent alimony, residence at matrimonial home or an equivalent accommodation.

Vijay

Sankgeetha

'Withdrew emotionally, distanced himself'

In her petition, Sankgeetha alleged that Vijay "gradually withdrew emotionally, distanced himself from conjugal life and excluded her from his social and professional engagements"

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